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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 002105

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SUBJECT: DART AL HILLAH ASSESSMENT

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SUMMARY  
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1. DART Field Team West arrived in Al Hillah on 11 May. On 12 May, the DART visited a maternity and children's hospital in Al Hillah, met with some local wakils, and met with representatives of Save the Children/U.S. who were returning through Al Hillah from a recent assessment of An Najaf and Karbala. End Summary.

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HEALTH  
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2. The DART visited the Babylon Maternity and Children's Hospital in Al Hillah on 12 May and found it had full electricity and water and sufficient stocks of most drugs for one month. However, it is precariously short of oxygen, IV fluids, antibiotics, and Pentostam, and has no blood-testing capabilities. Also, the hospital suffers from a shortage of fuel for its generator and ambulance and endures chronic incubator problems and shortages of vaccines. The sporadic immunization program ended at the onset of war, and the Ministry of Health (MOH) has yet to pay salaries. Many of the medical staff, who continued working throughout the war, often thwarting would-be looters, reside at the hospital to avoid the security risk of commuting.

3. The 380-bed hospital charges small fees for drugs in order to raise funds for overhead and future drug procurements from the MOH. Prior to the war, the hospital had to pay 20 percent of its revenue to the Ministry of Defense and five percent to the MOH. The hospital sees 150 to 200 patients a day, though during the war that number increased to 350 because many health centers had closed. Approximately 30 to 35 babies are born at the hospital each day. There are 30 specialist doctors and 40 residents, half of both are women. The other two hospitals in Al Hillah are the Surgical Hospital and the General Hospital, which has a pediatric ward. All of Al Hillah's primary health centers are open.

4. The greatest problem for children is diarrhea. The four doctors with whom we spoke said the rate was slightly higher than normal for this time of year. A gynecologist at the hospital, said that about 80 percent of the women she treats are anemic. As a result, there is a significant birth-weight problem. She said hypertension and bleeding were two other serious problems among women.

5. Last week, CARE provided a two-month supply of therapeutic milk and high-protein biscuits, and Medecins Sans Frontieres visited recently, bringing milk and feeding bottles. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has also visited. The staff said the Iraqi Red Crescent Society was no longer functioning, and that it had only worked on a limited basis before the war.

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ASSESSMENT BY SAVE THE CHILDREN  
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6. A four-person team from Save the Children/U.S. came through Al Hillah on their way back to Baghdad in order to debrief team west on their two-day rapid assessments of Karbala and An Najaf (two persons traveled to each city.) Save/U.S. is planning on setting up small offices, comprised of two expats and a small number of national staff in Karbala and An Najaf.

17. In Karbala, Save/U.S. visited a pediatric hospital, a number of schools, the Ministry of Education, religious leaders, and civil affairs teams. The main problems in Karbala include a shortage of life-saving drugs, increasing cases of diarrhea (one doctor in the main hospital believes that it is reaching epidemic proportions), severe lack of protein in the diets of the hospital patients, and water and sanitation issues (including lack of sanitation and treatment of water facilities.) Save/U.S. did not encounter any issues regarding unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in schools, however, targeted water and sanitation interventions are needed. The Save/U.S. also found pockets of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in empty lots around the city; most seemed to be old caseload IDPs.

18. In terms of implementation plans in Karbala, Save/U.S. would like to focus efforts on providing life-saving drugs, small equipment, materials, and fresh food to hospitals, providing support to the referral and supply system for clinics, and addressing water and sanitation needs in schools. Save/U.S. also reported that tensions are on the rise between the local population and Coalition forces.

19. In An Najaf, the Save/U.S. team visited various hospitals, schools and religious leaders. They found increased cases of diarrhea, suspected cholera cases, problems with sanitation and waste disposal, and suspected problems with UXOs in school buildings. In the main pediatric hospital, 70 percent of patients (about 170 per day) have diarrhea. Of those, 10 to 20 percent are severe (some seem to have symptoms of cholera.) About three to four children per week are admitted to the hospital with injuries related to UXOs.

110. In An Najaf, the sanitation and waste disposal system is working at full capacity; however, this only meets 20 percent of the city's needs. Save/U.S. was told that although many of the schools are open (about 50 percent of schools in the city are open at this time), parents are afraid to send their children because of possible UXOs in buildings and lack of security in the area (mainly dealing with looters and rumors of kidnappings.) Although looting has been fairly minimal in An Najaf, it does continue to occur. The Ministry of Social Affairs was looted of its contents on 12 May; all records were also apparently destroyed.

111. According to Save/U.S., the religious community has stepped up in a very positive way since the war began. They have been able to keep peace and cohesion amongst community members, which has resulted in lower incidents of looting and continued provision of basic services to the community. Save/U.S. plans to provide medical assistance to some of the hospitals with the most need and assist the Ministry of Social Affairs to get up and running again, (assistance with small-scale repair of the nursery/mental hospital for children and adolescents in town).

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FOOD  
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112. According to food wakils (distribution agents) in Al Hillah, the public distribution system (PDS) is functioning and all wakils are in place for future ration distributions. The last food distribution was conducted during the first week in May. Certain commodity shortages were reported and some recipients voiced concern regarding the quality of wheat and rice.

113. According to U.N. World Food Program national staff, the two major Al Hillah food warehouses are intact though minor repairs are needed such as locks and windows. Although the warehouses are stocked, food distributions are hampered by the presence of Coalition forces that have established themselves inside the warehouse. Current warehouse operations are allowed by coalition troops, but are limited to approximately 60 trucks per day. Normal warehouse operations can handle approximately 300 to 400 trucks per day. The DART has also learned from Coalition forces that this problem has been recognized and the coalition is looking into correcting the problem. The DART will monitor the issue.

114. The grain silo in Al Hillah is intact and stocked with an estimated one-month supply of grain. All fifteen mills that serve the Babil governate are operational with electricity and back-up generators.

115. Several issues of concern include the shortages of flour bags at the mills, the shortage of fuel, an increase in fuel prices, and lack of salaries for Ministry of Trade personnel.

JONES